

What Family Members Can Do During the Hiring Freeze

Reassess Your Skills and Map Out Your Next Steps

Below is part one of a series of articles by Laura Sheehan, Global Employment Advisor (GEA) for EAP East. Contact your GEA at GEI@state.gov.

Fellow EFMs! I have a few questions for you: When you were a child, what did you want to DO when you grew up? What did you want to BE? Did you ever think that you would be living where you are now? I certainly didn't. I spent the bulk of my childhood in small town Ohio. If someone had approached me when I was a kid and told me that I would end up marrying a man whose job would take me all over the world, that I would be raising my own children in far flung foreign lands, my eyes would have bulged, I would have given that person a quizzical look, maybe even laughed out loud (or at least said something like, "I think you've got the wrong girl,") and then turned on my heel and walked away.

I've never really had a clear idea of what I wanted to be when I grew up (still very much working on that). I wholeheartedly believed, however, that whatever I did with my life would be something that I would choose to do. So, I chose to go to college, then to law school. A year into my first full-time job as a lawyer, I chose to get married...to a person whose job involved international travel. And I knew on some level that choice would mean crazy things for my career path.

Sound familiar? Though our stories are all unique, we've each made a very similar set of decisions. And here we are! Thousands of us – spread across the globe. Whether it's our first or our fifth overseas posting, we all proudly claim the title EFM (which might be more aptly defined as Ever Flexible & Mobile). Between the lot of us, we have tried every form of employment available to us trailing spouses. We've been oh so frustrated at times, thinking here I am (again) in a new place, trying to (re)define my personal and professional identity...and eventually we find our way.

In some regions, we have an extra set of employment challenges to overcome. In not one of the countries that I currently serve, for example, do we have a bilateral or de facto work agreement. In some places (like Thailand), not even volunteering is allowed. There are, of course, a generous number of EFM employment opportunities inside each Mission, but everyone competes for the same jobs and now, with the hiring freeze, we are all exclaiming in frustration: "What do I do NOW?!"

Answer: As Stephen Covey (author of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*) said, **"You are not a product of your circumstances. You are a product of your decisions."**

We do indeed have a tough set of circumstances...but we can still choose NOW to DO something to move ourselves and our careers ahead. We can create new opportunities for ourselves. We can use this time to reassess our skills and to map out our next career adventures.

But how oh how do I DO that?!

Here are a few resources to help you get started:

1. **Complete a self-guided self-assessment.** Write down your three to five proudest moments. Describe in detail each situation, task at hand, action you took, and result it produced. These are your shining moments, your STAR stories. Then ask yourself, “What do all of these stories share?” Believe it or not, those three (or more) stories, those proud moments, are bound together with common threads that reveal your strengths and the core qualities of your ideal job.
2. **Need more of a guided approach to defining your career path?** Check out the following resources:
 - a. ***Strengths Finder 2.0*** - This is a book from Gallup, written by Tom Rath, and built on the research and methodology of Donald O. Clifton (inventor of the Clifton StrengthsFinder and recognized as the Father of Strengths-Based Psychology). The book includes instructions on how to find your strengths and how to apply them. As a bonus, the book includes a code for free access to the StrengthsFinder 2.0 online assessment and website.
 - b. ***The Art of Work*** – A book by Jeff Goins that recognizes that, “Life seldom unfolds the way we hope or plan. The twists, surprises, and setbacks leave us feeling stuck with no options left... [but there is] a better way, a daring journey to discover your life’s work.”
 - c. **MyNextMove** – Visit mynextmove.org. This website helps assess your interests, research careers and begin developing a list of skills and keywords to use in marketing yourself. This is essentially a database sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment & Training Administration, and developed by the National Center for O*NET Development.
 - d. **CareerOneStop** – Visit careeronestop.org. Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor, this site has information on starting your search, finding a career match, information on retraining, and more! Click on the “Explore Careers” tab and quickly navigate your way to either an Interest Assessment or a Skills Assessment. Choose one or do both!
 - e. **And these are just a few of the many resources out there!**
3. **Want personalized assistance in defining or finding your career path?** Schedule an appointment with your Global Employment Advisor (GEA)! GEAs are strategically placed all over the world and are ready and willing to help. Don’t know who your GEA is? Ask your CLO or email GEI@state.gov and you will be promptly directed.

So get going! Be bold! Take the first step on your new career adventure! I’ll be following up in the next newsletter. Oh, yes indeed – this is just the first installment in a small series of EFM employment articles! Keep your eye out for the next article, which will provide resources on how to figure out which industries and/or jobs might best suit your skill set. Later in the series, I will talk about resumes, LinkedIn, personal branding and how to launch an effective job search. If there’s interest, I can also add in a segment on starting your own business and becoming a solopreneur!